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SELF-DENIAL

THE

PREPARATION FOR EASTER.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"LETTERS TO MY UNKNOWN FRIENDS."

"It is a faithful saying: for if we be dead with Him, we shall also live with Him: if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him." — 2 *Timothy*, ii. 11, 12.



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SELF-DENIAL

THE PREPARATION FOR EASTER.

INTRODUCTION.

To the readers of the little work on "Discipline," it has already been suggested that great assistance may be given towards the attainment of self-knowledge, and in the improvement of Christian practice, by fixing the attention to a certain degree exclusively on one feature of the character during a given time. This has been frequently found to check the continuance of that vague and unprogressive personal religion, which through early habits and through natural indolence is too often sufficient to quiet though it cannot satisfy the minds of

the greater number of professing Christians. Satisfaction indeed it cannot give, for our nature is so constituted that it cannot ever be *satisfied* with remaining stationary. A yearning after progress there always is, oftentimes unconscious, but always in proportion to the superiority of the nature of the individual. Those who are lowest on the scale of creation are those who least desire to rise.

Mistaken views as to the duty or the efficacy of human effort are probably one great cause of the want of progress visible in the spiritual and moral condition of apparently sincere and earnest Christians. How few there are, at this returning season of Lent, who can trace in themselves, or (far safer test) in whom others can trace, any change in the lukewarm, self-indulgent, unsubdued spirit they have professed to mourn over during many a Lent that has passed. Yet such seasons, if employed aright, could not have

been passed in vain, and if not employed aright it is not alone in vain that they are passed: those who are partakers of the privileges of seasons such as these, must be either far better or far worse at their close—their ear more dull to future warnings, their heart more cold to spiritual things, their habits more self-indulgent, and their worldliness more confirmed. The appeal made to each individual by the coming season of Lent is therefore not simply to improve its responsibilities, but to strive to avoid deterioration by its neglected opportunities. One or the other must certainly befall. But past opportunities, though never to be recalled, are not altogether lost if regret and repentance accompany their memory. Then the former error will serve as a stimulus to future effort, and the recollection of the unprofitable Lenten seasons hitherto passed may, by God's grace, lead to redoubled exertion that the responsibilities of the

coming Lent may not be incurred in vain.

For this purpose it is surely desirable that some change should be made in the system of vague and undirected effort which has been hitherto tried and found wanting, and that some definite aim be distinctly placed before us during the coming season of Lent. No more of vague talking and imagining about humiliation and mourning, and self-denial, but let us, with God's help, force each day to yield positive proofs of our fulfilment of these duties. The earliest beginner in the Christian life may at the least make a law unto himself, that during the solemn season of Lent he should never allow the sun to go down upon him without his having fulfilled some peculiar Lenten duty, taken some one step in the path of Self-Denial, which is the true preparation for the joyful Easter time.

Much the same system as that recom-

mended in Discipline for a week's practice is here recommended for practice during the season of Lent. Chiefly with this difference, that Self-Denial being the duty pre-eminently brought before us by the nature of the season itself, and by the offices of the Church, it seems expedient that every feature of the character and the life should be considered with especial reference to this — our great *present* duty. Making Self-Denial, therefore, the principal object of attention and endeavour, each week is recommended to be set apart for the practice of this duty with reference to some one particular feature of character or habit of life. This will very much simplify the task of self-examination at the close of each day of each week, and where there is earnestness and sincerity of purpose there will scarcely be a possibility of self-deceit. The inquiries relating to each several branch of duty being strictly defined by being strictly circumscribed,

there is no danger of any but wilful evasion. Neither is it possible that the vigilant guarding against one fault or the earnest endeavour to fulfil one separate duty can be without its beneficial influence in the detection and cure of every other fault, in the fulfilment of every other duty. The moral nature must

“Move altogether if it move at all;”

and the attention of the conscience being concentrated on any one point, not only gives additional strength and efficiency to efforts in that one direction, but in all others also there is an unconscious increase of effort. Nor is this all, for the habit of vigilance against any one particular sin cannot, even if it were desired, be laid aside when the day or the week assigned to such special vigilance is over. Those who diligently exercise Self-Denial during the six weeks of Lent, though to each week may belong a different subject, will find each week's habits not

isolated from, but the accumulation of the habits of every other week: for all Christian graces, all Christian habits of life, are inseparably connected, being indeed, each and every one of them, branches from the same root — Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

ASH WEDNESDAY.

THE EXERCISE OF SELF-DENIAL IN
CONFESSION.

THE cleansing efficacy of the blood of Jesus is only experienced by those who make confession of sin. On this point the word of God is express. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy."† Also the Church, in her services for this day, appoints for use the words in which David pleads for the forgiveness of sin as the result of confession. "Wash me thoroughly from my wickedness, and cleanse me from my sin, for I

* 1 John, i. 9.

† Prov. xxviii. 13.

acknowledge my transgressions and my sin is ever before me.”* And in the Collect for this day the acknowledging of our wretchedness is stated to be the condition of our obtaining “perfect remission and forgiveness.”

The present season of deep mourning and humiliation for sin is surely of all others most fitted for a more than usually stringent self-examination and consequent confession to Almighty God. This will be assisted and rendered more efficient, instead of in any degree unnecessary, by the confession uttered in the daily services of the Church—also by the private nightly confession of particular sin uttered by all the living members of that Church before committing themselves during the helpless hours of sleep and darkness to the guardianship of Him “who is of purer eyes than to behold evil.”†

The accumulated experience, the addi-

* Ps. li.


† Hab. i. 13.

tional quick-sightedness gained by the habitual practice of self-examination and confession, may be advantageously tested at this yearly recurring season of Lent by the greater facility acquired in the detection and the confession of sin. It is impossible that any practice steadily persevered in during a whole year should not give evidence of that steady perseverance in greater correctness and facility of execution. We should probably consider it expedient to test in some such way as this the progress we are making in any temporal pursuit — how much ground we have got over during the course of a passed year — how many difficulties have become easy — how many ignorances removed. In spiritual things this test must indeed be more vague and indefinite ; yet so far as they are in any way connected with the practice or the intellect, they also assume a more tangible form, and the test of a year's progress may without

danger be applied to them. Thus, while it would be very difficult and to many states or classes of mind most unsafe to attempt a distinct measurement, as it were, of the progress made during a passed year in spiritual abhorrence of sin, it must be useful to all, and may be easy to all, to ascertain the increased facility with which sin may be detected in thoughts, words, and actions, and the increased determination with which each wrong thought, word, and action is confessed to Almighty God, and, if expedient, to one's fellow-man.

There will be many, alas ! who during the stricter than ordinary self-examination, which will probably be this day practised, can in no degree ascertain a progress in either of the above respects. Some of these may be safe, ay, blessed in their deep humility of heart, but even for them better it were if they employed in the best way God's best gifts of thought

and reason, and thus found safe grounds for hope and consolation. Others there are, however, who are only too correct in the desponding estimate they have formed of their own progress. This Ash Wednesday finds them no further advanced than the Ash Wednesday of each year that is passed: a vague conviction of sin, a confused heap of recollections of wrong words, thoughts, deeds, burdening the memory without enlightening or proportionably humiliating the heart, is to them the only result of perhaps the daily practice of self-examination and confession. Reader, is it thus with you? If it be thus, can you doubt whether you have practised aright that which you know you have practised? And if you have been all this time practising it in a wrong way, there can be little doubt that you have been thus making genuine self-examination, genuine confession more difficult even than it is its nature to be.



The difficulty is, however, far from hopeless, if you have been given grace, not only to see that you have made no progress, but also to desire, earnestly to desire, a progress which you have not hitherto made. To those who *earnestly* desire, “a difficulty is only a thing to be overcome—” by no means a thing to deter, even in the secular life; how much less in the spiritual life, where “sufficient” grace * is freely offered to those who need, to those who ask. And as at all seasons the present hour is the only safe, as well as by far the easiest, time to begin a difficult and important work, still more is the present season especially adapted for breaking through former habits of carelessness, and setting ourselves with all earnestness and diligence to the better fulfilment of the duties of self-examination and confession, now especially impressed upon us by the services of our

* 2 Cor. xii. 9.

Church. "Let us turn to the Lord with all our hearts, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning."* Let us so "worthily lament our sins and acknowledge our wretchedness," † as "to obtain of the God of all mercy perfect remission and forgiveness." There is no hope that this perfect remission and forgiveness can be obtained without a complete confession. Those sins which we forget God remembers. Those sins which are not confessed and mourned over now will in so far diminish our capability of enjoying the happiness of Heaven, even if through God's mercy our partial repentance be finally accepted for Christ's sake. Nor can we even know, nor dare we even judge, how many sins, or what degree of sin unrepented of, may make our entrance into the kingdom of Heaven impossible. The exact degree of meetness

* The Epistle for Ash Wednesday.

† The Collect for Ash Wednesday.

absolutely needful, the exact degree of unfitness absolutely disqualifying for the Beatific presence, will only come within the reach of human knowledge when all is over, when the end is come, and the state throughout eternity unalterably fixed. Here, happily for us, the languid endeavour, and the low earthly aim, must ever be excited and disturbed by the uncertainty of *safe* degrees of attainment in the spiritual life.

This is a startling thought as regards unconfessed, unrepented sin. For the sin which to us in a moment of unchristian carelessness, or of great temptation, may appear so trifling as to pass unregarded from the memory, may in His sight who "is of purer eyes than to behold evil," wear a true aspect of dark malignity. To the All-seeing every aggravating circumstance of former warnings, of former repentance, of former forgiveness, gives a

different character to sin from that which any human judgment can form.

“ ’Tis He alone who makes the heart
Decidedly can try it:”

but it is not only on the side of indulgence that this Omniscience must operate. If extenuating circumstances of weakness, of ignorance, of strong aggravation may, in some cases, modify the Divine judgment into greater mildness than that of man, we should also bear steadily in mind that Omniscience, independent of the full sense of the horrible nature of sin, must be qualified to form a more severe than any human judgment, as well as a more lenient than any human judgment. This consideration is most important to keep in view while seeking to perform aright the duty of confession. It is not the sins that seem great in our own eyes that we are to content ourselves with confessing and repenting of, — but all sin, the very smallest — even the doubtful sin. How

much more anxious and vigilant would be the search throughout the memory during the past day, the past month, the past year, if we really believed that the one, even one omitted sin, might be that for which God will bring us into judgment: and where is the promise that thus it will not be? for where is the promise of forgiveness to unrepented sin? But the earnest, faithful follower of Christ “knows whom he has believed,” and trusts Him that if he labour with all due diligence to make his calling and election sure, the Holy Spirit will search and try his heart, and bring every sin to his remembrance before it be too late, and he be finally excluded from the kingdom of Heaven for what men vainly call a little sin. “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, the same is guilty of all.”*

With equal trust and fear, therefore, will each humble follower of Christ run

* James, ii. 10.

the course that is set before him, knowing that another has fought the battle and gained the prize for him, and that He will be his sure helper, even to the end, if only he strive with "*all diligence*."* O Reader, these are strong words, and words that may well mingle fear for ourselves with trust in Him; for which, amongst us, is striving with "*all diligence*"? Let us particularly apply these words to the duty more especially set before us this day, that of confession of sin. What diligence are we using that such confession may be comprehensive,—may, as far as in us lies, be complete? Have we ever thought as earnestly, as anxiously over our past lives, with reference to the detection of forgotten sin, as we have often done for a secular purpose? Has the opening of our eyes to the detection of forgotten sin been ever made the subject of that prayer which is earnest even to agony?† Is it

* 2 Peter, i. 5.

† Luke, xxii. 24.

thus we have prayed that God may not suffer the taint of unrepented sin to rest upon our souls, that He may grant the Holy Spirit's help to search and try *all* our past lives, as well as our present course of conduct, and to show us, while the day of mercy still lasts, what there is in either that requires to be repented of.

When the heart is enlightened by prayer and the teaching of the Holy Spirit, the light will begin to dawn on many dark forgotten passages of former sinful life; on many sinful indulgences, sinful tempers, sinful habits of present life. Each moment of the passing hour may bring back some forgotten things into the memory of those who now are stedfastly prepared by God's help to leave no sin unconfessed, no sin unrepented of. Thus the humble penitent will be reminded by each feeling of weakness and languor, of former strength unprofitably used, of former undue indulgence in food or sleep or amusement, of indolent

neglect of exercise, of self-seeking mortifications used for excitement or vain glory. By each feeling of disinclination to engage in laborious work, the humble penitent will be reminded of the days and weeks spent in luxurious living, which have more and more unfitted him for enduring hardness "as a good soldier of Jesus Christ;" * more and more unfitted him for active Self-Denial in the execution of labours of love for Christ's sake. By each feeling of irritation at slights, at contradiction, at opposition, former seasons of unchecked yielding to the same selfish, wilful, haughty emotions will be brought to mind, with the accompanying consciousness that it was the neglect of self-control then which now gives strength to far weaker temptations. And even the pain inflicted by the sin of others may serve to the watchful and penitent heart as a reminder of its own. For the unkind word and the uncourteous manner, and

* 2 Tim. ii. 3.

the ungracious refusal may, in most cases, be at least partially traced to some former sin of those who receive the unkindness. Our own former unkind words have sown the seeds of those which pain us from others; our own want of courtesy has occasioned and partly justified the discourtesy of others; the ungracious refusal is most probably only the echo of some former ungracious refusal of our own: and this not by way of revenge in those who may often be unconscious of the pain they give, but rather the inevitable result of one individual's sin acting on the corrupt nature of another. In some such way as this it is that each transgression involves in its consequences its own inevitable punishment. It is an important step taken in self-knowledge, when the faults of others are turned to such account, and doubtless it will also very far extend the comprehensiveness of each confession of sin. How much, too, must the consciousness

of having so far made another the partaker in our sin, add to the mourning and humiliation it causes.

“Confess your sins one to another,” is the exhortation of St. James; and it cannot be doubted that obedience to the apostolic precept often proves an effectual help to the confession we have to make to Almighty God. The deceitfulness of the heart is so great as to disguise almost hopelessly “its desperate wickedness.” It is true, that the Spirit of God alone may, and sometimes does, awaken the heart to a consciousness of the besetting sin; but God ordinarily works by human agency, and most frequently the teaching of the Spirit is only effectual through that agency. It is often lamentable to see how long the apparently earnest and devoted Christian may make use of all the appointed means of grace, while the heart is unenlightened as to the real nature of the besetting sin, and the tempers and habits of life consequently remain unin-

fluenced by the great truths he professes to receive. How many there are who go on year after year indulging the same discontented spirit, while they profess to have their heart, because they hope they have their treasure, in Heaven. How many in whom evil tempers are allowed and self-denial neglected, habits of luxury and idleness strengthened, self-will and pride reigning unchecked in the heart, while theirs is an ideal practice, because theirs is a profession of lovingkindness, of self-sacrifice, of humility, and self-renunciation. This fatal self-deception, even when long practised, has been frequently removed, and a downward course effectually checked by confession to a faithful friend of such sins as are already partially recognised. By this I do not mean the confession to "discreet and learned ministers of God's Word," recommended in the exhortation previous to receiving the Holy Communion. When all other means have

been earnestly and perseveringly tried to quiet a guilty conscience, it cannot surely be denied that the Reformed Church sanctions this last resource. Its being sanctioned only occasionally, *not habitually*, but as a last resource*, avoids the

* The Bishop of Exeter writes thus : — “ So little is our Church inclined to encourage its ministers in prying into the secrets of their penitents, that it enjoins every other step to be previously taken before the last measure of particular confession be proposed.” — Confession and Absolution, a republication of Letter IX. to C. Butler, Esq.

And thus : — “ In the exhortation to be used in giving warning of the Communion, it assumes that persons in general may be expected to satisfy themselves of the sincerity and fulness of their repentance, by examining their lives and conversation by the Rule of God’s Commandments — and it is only if there be any who cannot *by this means* quiet his own conscience herein, but requireth further counsel and advice, that the Church recommends special confession to a priest. In short, the Church earnestly impresses on the party the duty of *doing all that he can himself* in the way of self-examination, self-judgment, self-correction, in order to attain unto ‘repentance not to be repented of ;’ and it is only when he has himself done all he can towards quieting his own conscience in *vain*, that he is instructed to have recourse to private confession and

imputation, that confession in the Reformed Church has any tendency to form a part of the system of "having one's religion done for one." Confession to a "discreet and learned minister" (for here alone official qualifications do not suffice), is plainly only to be resorted to when every personal exertion has failed; when the mind, weakened by habits of sin and doubt, and frequently by sickness, — the

private absolution. In my opinion that is virtually to *discourage the general habit*; for such general habit would seem to show, either that the party adopting it did never honestly and earnestly strive to do all that he can for himself, — or that, having once received private absolution, he is so unstable, so light-minded, so utterly incapable of all self-control, that after such absolution he is continually relapsing into sin, and sin of such malignity, that he cannot of himself attain (by the ordinary grace of God) to true repentance. Surely we must believe that such cases, if there are any such, are very rare.

"I say therefore now, as I have more than once publicly said before, as well as privately told my candidates for holy orders, that the Church of England appears to me to 'discourage confession as a general habit.'" — Letter to Mr. Prynne.

punishment of sin, requires the support of a healthy mind, and the testing of its spirit by some authority external to its own disordered frame. And there can be no doubt, that the more "discreet" the minister who receives a confession, the more strongly will he urge on the penitent the necessity of personal exertion for the ascertaining of his own spiritual condition, and the impossibility of casting upon another the burden of such responsibility.

Even with reference to the form of confession which St. James recommends—"one to another," there is always the accompanying danger of relaxation in the strictness and earnestness of self-examination and confession of sin to Almighty God. In cases where a wise and faithful friend has proved an effectual aid to the enlightenment of the heart and consequent improvement of the practice, there follows too frequently a vague sense of personal freedom from responsi-

bility by having installed another as the guardian of one's conscience. This is a danger that requires great vigilance to detect, and afterwards to avert; for it is so weary and interminable a labour to "keep the heart with all diligence,"* that poor weak human nature will use every excusable evasion of the duty. One safeguard against the temptation is to use confession very rarely, and the advice of a friend only as suggestive, by no means to depend on it as guiding. If the friend to whom confession is made be well and wisely chosen, he or she will be very careful to give no more than the necessary degree of help, and not even at once to point out the faults which are at the root of confessed sins, but rather suggesting the means by which they may be self-detected. The great secondary object of the confessor should be to save no trouble at all to the person who confesses. No degree of wisdom or judgment in a friend can make

* Proverbs, iv. 23.

amends for any relaxation in personal exertion. It is most important that the natural infirmity of indolence should not be allowed to offer any temptation to the too frequent practice of confession.*


Another effectual safeguard against its unnecessary frequency is the exercise of Self-Denial in confession. People love to talk of themselves. It is a hackneyed remark that, even talking of one's own faults is much pleasanter than not talking of oneself at all. Here, therefore, is another temptation to the too frequent or the unnecessary practice of confession: unless, then, there be something unpalatable about it, it will neither be safe in itself,

* Mr. Newland, the well-known author of "Lectures on Tractarianism," writes thus: —

"I do believe that habitual and periodical confession, were it practicable, would in the end emasculate and enervate the English character. By permitting itself to repose on another, be he who he may, the weight of those responsibilities which God has laid on every one of us, conscience would lose its healthy action." — Confession and Absolution, p. 17.

nor will it be practised from safe motives. Unless Self-Denial be exercised in confession, it is more dangerous than profitable. To those who do not know human nature well, it may sound strange to speak of a confession of sin which does not humble and pain the person who confesses; but such confessions are perfectly practicable. There are many faults which people think it no shame to be guilty of, many faults which have quite an air of grandeur about them, such as the fancied penitent thinks no mean person could be capable of; therefore it is easy to be candid and fluent too in the enumeration of such faults as these. The way to avoid every temptation of this sort, is to make the exercise of Self-Denial inseparable from confession. This will prove a true test of the healthy motive, of the right act.


Those who confess must, however, remember that they have duties to fulfil to their confessors as well as to themselves.



If the counsel of the confessor is only used as suggestive, the necessity is altogether obviated of burdening their minds with the knowledge of sins or of secrets, — a burden which perhaps can never afterwards be removed. To God only should the secrets of all hearts be made known. To the Most Holy only is there safety in the sight of “that hideous spectacle, a naked human heart.” And to the Omniscient only could such knowledge be efficient for our help, our discipline, our guidance. No human wisdom can tell whether the passing emotion, the almost unconscious action, form a part of the real nature, or result inevitably from circumstance. Repeated to a human ear, they might stamp those who confess them as for ever guilty of perhaps the very sins most foreign, if not impossible, to their nature ; while our Heavenly Father can know all and still “love us,” not always “though,” but sometimes *because*,

“He reads us true.”

And if great caution should be used in the subjects and extent of confession, at least equal caution is required in selecting the persons to whom the most cautious confession is made. In sex, in age, and experience, they should be thoroughly qualified to sympathise with, and to form a correct judgment concerning, the confession they receive. An extensive knowledge of human nature, founded on natural sympathy and on tried experience, is indispensable. No spiritual attainments can enable one individual to judge of the besetting sins and temptations of another, without the great natural gift of sympathy. Even in such extreme, and therefore more easily judged of cases, where confession to a minister is sanctioned by the Reformed Church, the person who confesses is allowed the choice of a confessor. None of the other offices of the minister being so dependent on his personal and intellectual qualifications as this, it is the only



one in which the ministrations of the parish priest may be abandoned for those of the pastor of another flock.

But in cases of confession "one to another," such as is recommended by St. James,—the advice given having chiefly reference to the practical details of the spiritual and moral life, and not to the quieting of the conscience (which is clearly the office of the minister*),—it is of paramount importance that the confessor should be highly qualified by nature, and additionally qualified by experience. And for the undertaking of such an office, how largely, too, must they be gifted with Christian sympathy! How deeply influenced by the spirit of Christian self-

* The whole of the Bishop of Exeter's pamphlet on confession and absolution, his several letters to Mr. Prynne, and the Bishop of Oxford's published correspondence on the same subject, will furnish satisfactory answers to those inquirers who anxiously seek to "know the mind" of their Church on the points of private confession and private absolution.

sacrifice! On the side of the confessor too, as well as of those who confess, there must be a constant exercise of Self-Denial, as the only preservative against the great danger that early motives of Christian benevolence and self-sacrificing friendship may degenerate into a love of power and a jealousy of influence. Most seductive, and, if yielded to, most fatal, is the temptation to tyrannize over the mind!

FIRST WEEK IN LENT.**SELF-DENIAL EXERCISED IN
OBEDIENCE.**

It is difficult ever to be certain that the true principle of obedience is acted on unless Self-Denial accompany the act. In this, as in most cases, Self-Denial is the only safe test of an action's moral worth. To obey from the true principle of obedience is not easy, as those might think who have never tried. To the inexperienced it is now earnestly recommended to try the duty for a week, in a new form, in connection with Self-Denial: through great diligence, and more especially earnestness, they may, by the end of the week, attain so far as to know what obedience really is. It is not — to yield to the force of external circumstances. It is not — to yield one's just rights for peace' sake. It

is not—to observe the ordinances of the Church, because others observe them. It is not—to conform to established regulations, because it is less trouble than to break through them.

Yet, exactly the same outward actions may result from these meaner motives as from the Christian principle of obedience; and it is only when tried by the test of Self-Denial that their real nature appears. That this real nature should appear, is important, even as regards temporal things; for while the exercise of the principle of obedience tends, above almost all other means, to strengthen and elevate the character and enhance the power of self-control, an *unprincipled* obedience, having its source in weakness, has weakness also for its result. He who at first yields only things indifferent for peace' sake, will gradually yield things more and more important, until principle itself is sacrificed. He who yields to the force of external cir-

cumstances, will be tyrannical — only a meaner form of weakness — when the force of external circumstances is on his side instead of against him. He who conforms to established regulations because it is less trouble than to break through them, will cease to conform whenever that becomes more troublesome than to follow an independent course. He who observes Church ordinances because others observe them, will find them profitless to his soul, and will give up the observance whenever a stronger motive arises. The weak practisers of an *unprincipled* obedience are the sport of every passing breath of circumstance.

It is plain that no Self-Denial is exercised in any of the acts of obedience above enumerated. Disobedience, in fact, would be Self-Denial, and not obedience; for disobedience would involve danger, and difficulty, and trouble, and loss of respectability. Let us now see in what

manner the principle of obedience may be exercised so as to fulfil the duty of Self-Denial.

And first, to consider obedience to the force of external circumstances, — that is, yielding to those who are not only placed in authority over us, but have the power to compel an however unwilling obedience. To the young, or to those in dependant positions, opportunities will most frequently occur of exercising the principle of obedience in submission to the will of “the powers that be,” who are “ordained of God,” instead of merely obeying because they *must* obey. As the outward act will in both cases be nearly the same, there must be the more diligence in ascertaining its true motive. The secret feeling of the heart towards the authority which commands an unpalatable act of obedience will be a great help to ascertain the truth. If feelings of bitterness, ill-will, or discontent, are allowed and che-

rished, there is no Self-Denial here; the principle of obedience has not been exercised. The yielding has been a mean yielding to brute force, which degrades and weakens the whole character in exact proportion as a yielding from the principle of obedience would ennoble and strengthen it.

There are, however, many cases in which obedience is a positive and important duty, when the force of external circumstances by no means compels it. In these cases Self-Denial is frequently the test not only of the duty, but also of the expediency of the act of obedience. It is true that the advantage to one's own spirit can never be doubtful where Self-Denial and obedience are combined together; but there are occasions when even this advantage must be sacrificed for the good of the "neighbour" who asserts an unjust claim or exercises unfounded authority. The safe test on such occasions is, whether

Self-Denial is exercised or natural feeling indulged; and indeed so great exercise of Self-Denial is there in the control over the spirit required for a gentle, courteous, and high-principled resistance, that the spiritual gain may, after all, be as great as if the principle of obedience had been fully carried out in action.

It is, however, most difficult for those who do not exercise habitually the principle of obedience to come to a *safe* decision as to the authority that commands obedience, or the real extent of its just claims. Man is by nature disobedient; his spirit rises rebelliously against the mere fact of asserted authority. An act which would be otherwise simply indifferent becomes unpalatable the moment it is commanded. This natural spirit of insubordination, if not habitually subdued, will gradually extend beyond created authority, will unconsciously very much increase the difficulty of obeying the com-

mands of a Heavenly Ruler. The connection is intimate and seldom broken between a democratic and an irreligious spirit. The exercise of a principle of obedience towards "the powers that be" is a true and scarcely an indirect mode of cherishing and strengthening the spirit of obedience to Him who "ordained" them.*

Let these assertions be put to the test of observation, and then brought to the test of practice. Who walk so humbly, so closely, with their God as those who submit implicitly to all constituted authority? Where is the spirit of love, of meekness, of unworldliness, so manifest as in those who fully recognise the qualifications of office *alone* as entitled to respect and obedience? Where is the man whose rule over his fellow-men is at once firm and gentle, and who is not at the same time characterised by all due submission and reverence towards his own superiors?

* Romans, xiii. 1.

The same spirit it is which is exercised in both directions — and the same strength: for the weak are ever disobedient, and the weak are ever tyrannical.

Now let these assertions be tried by the test of practice. In what frame of mind is obedience most readily rendered? — in what frame of mind is disobedience the first and strongest impulse? Is it while the halo of accepted prayer still glows around the chastened spirit that the assertion of authority most readily excites to resistance — that the mind is most insensible to the duty of exercising Self-Denial in obedience? Is it not rather at those moments when worldliness is strong in the heart, when vanity is gratified and indulged, when the body is enervated by luxury instead of being brought into subjection by temperance, that rebellious impulses prompt to even a vain resistance, and withhold the grace of yielding from even an inevitable obedience? The coming

day, certainly the coming week, will afford opportunities of self-examination as to how far we are each influenced by the principle of obedience. By an earnest watchfulness we may easily ascertain what feelings they are that the dictates of authority first arouse in the mind. Is the command of the parent, of the husband, of "those that watch for your souls as they that must give account,"* recognised as the command of One who has to them delegated his earthly authority? In one sense the voice of God is still heard upon earth. This very day you may hear it; even in the exercise of wantonly exercised and capricious authority it may, it ought to be, heard. And it will matter little in the end, for those who obey, whether the responsibilities of power and position are fulfilled or neglected. An obedience as unto God will be rewarded by God Himself, and that not only in His heavenly

* Hebrews, xiii. 17.

kingdom, but even now, even here: for those who have by the exercise of Self-Denial in obedience gained a likeness to the Saviour's "meek and lowly mind," have in one sense already entered "into the joy of their Lord." *

* Matthew, xxv. 23.

SECOND WEEK IN LENT.

SELF-DENIAL EXERCISED IN
PERSONAL INDULGENCE.

I DOUBT much whether the greater number of people are agreed as to the duty and necessity of even the most modified form of Self-Denial in personal indulgences. As regards this, as well as many other subjects, the Bible is taken up, not to examine with an unprejudiced heart what its plain precepts are, but with a preconceived idea firmly established in the mind which even the words of inspiration cannot disturb from its place. Nor can it be expected that those who explain away or turn a deaf ear to the precepts of Scripture, should be more easily influenced by the teaching of the Prayer Book and the Church. The admission is, indeed, inevit-

able that Self-Denial has been throughout all ages the practice and the teaching of the Catholic Church to which they profess to belong — and that the days appointed for Self-Denial are marked in that Prayer Book, they often profess to be implicitly guided by, but the ear of their mind is still closed, they will not, alas! perhaps they cannot hear.

Many of the firm and strenuous opposers of every form of Self-Denial and mortification are, it is certain, diligent readers of the Holy Scriptures; are often, it is certain, eminent for moral excellence; are strict in their observance of many religious duties; and are so highly gifted intellectually, that it can be from no obtuseness of perception they study their Bible, and profess to follow the guidance of their Prayer Book, while they altogether deny the existence of duties plainly prescribed and universally implied in both. Their blindness can be owing

but to the firm establishment of the pre-conceived idea which our wily adversary has seized early opportunities to suggest ; and the idea is this—that a God of mercy can find no pleasure in the sufferings of His creatures—can feel no approbation of them, but rather indignation that His ignorant worshippers should ascribe to His holy nature the cruel attributes of the heathen gods.

Of this assertion no one can deny the truth, but it is only a partial truth, and altogether a false statement, and an incorrect view of the nature of Self-Denial and mortification. As illustration is better suited to the present treatment of this subject than argument, let us suppose a parallel case. A benevolent physician has a patient whose health and life depend on the strict regimen required by a disordered constitution. His medical knowledge enables him fully to appreciate the importance to this patient of abstinence from favourite

luxuries, from favourite occupation, from the charms of society, from the interests of business. The life of the patient would necessarily be one of constant Self-Denial; but is it necessarily one of pain? No; the importance of the object in view, the hope of renewed health, of prolonged life, makes endurance easy, and changes the unpalatable nature of every self-denying act. Such is the case of the patient himself, and how feels the benevolent physician, who knows still better than the patient the good effects that will result from every self-denying act, who knows disease will be healed, and weakness will be strengthened, and excitement subdued by the temporary sacrifice of momentary gratification? When the benevolent physician looks upon these acts of Self-Denial with pleasure, does he rejoice in the suffering which accompanies them (and that too, we have seen, has often no real existence), or does he not rather rejoice in the

results? And when our Heavenly Physician, omniscient as to the disease which afflicts our moral and spiritual nature, looks approvingly upon the strict regimen of Self-Denial and mortification which He only fully knows is essential to its cure, can it be said that the pain accompanying Self-Denial is an acceptable offering unto Him, and not rather the beneficial, the all-important, results to the patient himself?

Another parallel illustration may be found in the case of a teacher at a school. He knows from his own experience that labour is distasteful to our fallen nature, he knows that there is no hard work equal to the labour of the mind. Yet is it not in proportion to the interest this teacher feels in a pupil's welfare, that he enforces this distasteful labour, that he rejoices to see his pupil engaged in persevering labour? this surely, not because he rejoices in the suffering to a certain degree inseparable from labour, but because he knows

it is the only way that learning can be gained.

Harder is the lesson we have to learn than that taught at any earthly school, and our Heavenly Teacher looks approvingly at the suffering through which alone that lesson can be learnt, not for the suffering's sake, but for the sake of its results. Why the nature should be diseased and require so severe a regimen, why the lesson should be so hard to learn and require such bitter teaching, is a question we may not ask, because here we can never know. One only of the great truths we are given assuredly to know may easily silence the asking of even harder questions than these: our Bible tells us, that "God is love."

The secondary objection contained in the view ordinarily taken of Self-Denial and mortification is closely connected with the first, and its answer is involved in the illustrations already made use of. It is,

however, so commonly heard, and appears so dangerously delusive to those who employ it as an excuse for the nonfulfilment of duty, that some repetition may not be altogether vain. The objection alluded to is this: —

If, which they truly recognise as impossible, the sufferings of the creature, his relinquishment of pleasure and comfort, is not an acceptable offering to God, what is the use of it? *It* surely is not a good thing in itself, like obedience to the moral law ; and if it is not, as they say, a good thing in itself, they are firmly determined they will neither see it in the Prayer Book or the Bible.

But perhaps, if their eyes were so far opened to see that the command to deny oneself is really a *moral* command, they might then be able to see how clearly it is also a *positive* command.

The objectors, whose views have been here stated, belong to the class of believers

in the Christian Revelation, and therefore believers in the fact of original sin. They acknowledge a diseased nature; they acknowledge the need of remedies for the disease. The character of these remedies is distinctly stated in the Book they take for their guide of life, but their preconceived idea rejects these statements as symbolical and allegorical, as peculiar either to the language or the time in which they were employed. The Saviour, indeed, told his poor, and houseless, and persecuted disciples, that except a man denied himself and took up his cross daily, he could not follow Him; but was this hard saying intended for the rich, comfortable, world-favoured follower of Christ in the nineteenth century? St. Paul found it needful to "keep under his body and bring it into subjection;" but is this precept needed by the distant, very distant, followers of the great Apostle? Even a St. Paul, through self-indulgence, might

be a "castaway;" but how is this warning applicable to our steady and unwavering heavenward course? Even a Timothy must "endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ;"* but the precept of the Saviour and the example of the saint are alike supposed to be confined to the days of hardship, destitution, and danger in which they were first uttered, when circumstances alone constituted a severer discipline than any which could be now self-imposed.

But to return to the point in question, What is the use of Self-Denial and mortification in connection with the diseased nature, which is acknowledged as a certain truth? Are Self-Denial and mortification the cure appointed by God himself, thus constituting a *positive* command? or is there between them the inevitable connection of cause and effect, thus constituting a *moral* command? The first is denied

* 2 Tim. ii. 3.

by the objectors; but the principal difficulty of its acknowledgment would be removed if the second were proved, the plain words of Scripture might then be allowed their full meaning.

This is a subject on which demonstrative evidence is impossible. As no given remedy is the certain cure for any earthly disease, still less can any mode of discipline prove a certain cure for spiritual disease. In both cases it is the hand of God which gives or withholds efficacy from the remedy employed. Therefore we can no more say that the most potent medicine will certainly effect a cure of bodily sickness than that the most severe sufferings will purify the heart. We cannot positively assert any further than this — that both in their several spheres of action have been found by experience frequently efficacious, and certainly more efficacious than any other known means. Therefore, as we infer from the frequent


success of any given medicine in any particular case that it is the best means to use, though not universally certain in its results, also we ought to infer from the frequent success of suffering and Self-Denial in the purification of the spirit that it is the best means to be used, although, alas! there are melancholy cases of the severest afflictions being altogether powerless to soften the hard heart and awaken the seared conscience.

Personal experience and observation of life will both confirm the Scriptural assertion, that it is "for their profit" the children of God are chastised.* Let the objector to the duty of Self-Denial look into his own heart and say at what seasons it is most dead to the world, most alive to spiritual things, most patient and tender-hearted towards fellow-men, most willing and ready for employment and hard work in God's service. Is it not when sorrow

* Hebrews, xii. 10.

has crushed the spirit and silenced the voice of earthly hope? Is it not when God, by inflicting heavy sickness upon us, has taken into his own hand the work which by Self-Denial and mortification He more frequently wills should be done by ourselves? In both cases, if the blessing of God be given to appointed means, the same object is effected, "the body is kept under and brought into subjection;" the "good soldier of Jesus Christ endures hardness," to strengthen him for battle, to fit him for victory.

And not only from personal experience, but also from observation of life, the candid objector may learn the connection of cause and effect which exists between endurance of suffering and improvement of heart. Who are they amongst professing Christians who walk most closely with their God, whose spirit breathes most love, most patience, most gentleness, whose activity in every good work, whose



readiness for hardship and self-sacrifice exceeds that of others? Is it not those who have been most severely disciplined by suffering, whose heart has been deadened to this world by many and oft-repeated afflictions, whose strength has been oftenest prostrated by sickness? These are they whom the Lord loves*; these are they who, by chastisement, have been made more worthy objects of Divine Love.

Seeing, then, that the trials resulting from external circumstances, from the immediate hand of God, have the almost universal effect of strengthening and elevating the character, and giving more depth and reality to the spiritual life, is it not a fair inference, that the analogy so frequently used in Scripture is altogether correct, and that the mind diseased by sin requires the same regimen as the diseased body? Following out this analogy, the *moral* nature is plain enough of those

* Hebrews, xii. 6.

Scripture precepts which exhort to Self-Denial and mortification. Those who enjoy perfect health may indeed freely “partake of all things which God has given us richly to enjoy ;” but the invalid must follow a regimen of abstinence from the food, from the occupations, and from the interests which are not only safe but strengthening to those who are in full health. And thus it is with the diseased soul. For it the rule of life is not what would be innocent or safe for the “upright” being which God originally created, but a regimen that will be alternately, or at the same time, lowering and bracing, through which to attain, if it may be, to the restoration of the soul’s health. The Great Physician has laid down these rules for us in His Holy Book, the professed guide of our life. Alas! that any should be so blinded as not to see them there!

There is another consideration, appealing strongly to the fears of man, which

cannot but suggest itself in connection with the fact of the occurrence of discipline in some form or other as inseparable from the restoration of the soul to health. It is this—that if, through the delusions of Satan, those who shall be finally saved are kept from the voluntary practice of Self-Denial and mortification, God's love and favour towards them must necessarily be shown in much more severe afflictions than would have been required had they obeyed the Saviour's commands and voluntarily taken up their cross themselves. Their disobedience, or, at the least, their dulness of hearing, involves its own punishment, as is invariably the case; while a strict regimen, early and habitually and perseveringly employed, would probably avert the infliction of such severity of discipline as may only be required in extreme cases of spiritual as well as bodily disease.

When the duty of Self-Denial in personal

indulgence is recognised, and the mind fully purposed to obey in this important point, there will still be much difficulty in ascertaining the measure and the degree. This varies with every individual case; the teaching of the Bible and the Church being only express on one point, that Self-Denial of some sort is needful to our spiritual health. The Self-Denial first practised by the Church under the head of fasting consisted in abstinence from meat and wine; her early discipline on this point originating in warm countries where little nourishment and no stimulants were required. When afterwards the countries of the North were Christianised, the dispensations of the Romish Church, always extensive in proportion to their need, obviated, in a great degree, the injury to health which would have arisen in cold damp climates from the want of the peculiar nourishment which the constitutions formed by such climates require.

When England threw off the Papal yoke, the nature of the fasting to be practised by the members of the Reformed Church was left optional by the wisdom of the Reformers. Fasting, itself, was distinctly prescribed, and stated days appointed as fasts; but whether the fasting be from "pleasant meats," or from nourishing meats, or from meat of every kind, is nowhere mentioned in the Prayer Book. There were, indeed, acts passed in Elizabeth's reign, and Edward the Sixth's, directing, under penalty for disobedience, that fish should be eaten on fast days, for political reasons, which have long ceased to exist. But though acts of parliament have dictated the modes of fasting which were most expedient for the forwarding of secular purposes, the Reformed Church has not advanced one step further than to prescribe the duty itself, and the days on which it is to be practised; thus wisely leaving to each National Church and to

each peculiar constitution the choice of that mode of fasting which is to them best suited to accomplish the end in view, that of keeping “under the body, and bringing it into subjection.”*

This end it is certain can only be attained by the due care of the bodily health. When that is neglected or injured by excesses, either in intemperance or fasting (the result is much the same in both), the will is prostrated, and the body rules instead of being brought into subjection. There is still a lower deep than this — when the will not only becomes helpless to execute a moral purpose, but even to make a moral choice,—when the moral sense is wholly lost, or only occasional gleams remain to make the darkness visible to the wretched sufferer. Such cases are by no means rare, and the misery is almost always self-inflicted by various species of will-worship,

* 1 Cor. ix. 27.

or by disobedience of God's law in some other form.

Whatever dangerous error may exist as to the lawfulness of so weakening the body that it can no longer fulfil the appointed duties of the state in life to which God has called us, few would maintain that they have an equal right to sacrifice their mental strength. Few would maintain that, the *end* being accomplished by the mere act of fasting, the result rests in God's hand, and is no fault of our own. Yet, practically, this is the opinion of those who incur any risk of injuring their health by fasting or other species of mortification. Whether the penalty of their rashness may fall on their mind or on their body, they cannot tell; this probably depends on the degree of punishment required by their self-seeking and will-worship.

The fasting which makes the body a submissive agent to the spirit must ever be regulated in obedience to the dispensations of


God's Providence. They clearly mark out to each individual what abstinence it is that is best for his soul's and his body's health. No rash human hand may, with impunity, separate the two objects. Our Heavenly Father, it is true, often sees that it is needful for us that sickness should lower our bodily strength, even to the brink of the grave ; but when this peculiar species of discipline is needed, He takes it into His own hands. He alone can know the exact period of our spiritual life when such peculiar species of discipline will prove beneficial ; if we wilfully choose it for ourselves, we take ourselves out of His guiding hands. And if, by so doing, we lower ourselves even unto death, and thus abandon our Master's work before the appointed time, what hope have we of the joyful welcome, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord !" In no important respect does the impatient servant, who

would not wait to trade with his Lord's talents, differ from the slothful servant who went and hid his talent in the earth.

Fasting and Self-Denial become wholly an act of obedience to God when they are practised in strict conformity to the circumstances which He has ordained. Much more self-denying, too, is that species of fasting which varies with every variation of health, and age, and place. Little knowledge of human nature is required to observe that far less patience and watchfulness are required to maintain one uniform system as regards fasting, than to wait for the intimations of God's will concerning it as revealed in the varying circumstances of life. Thus, the purposes of Self-Denial may be more effectually carried out by eating when the health of the body requires it, however distasteful the interruption to an engrossing occupation, — by entering into amusing society when the health of the mind requires it, however

painful the change from a beloved solitude ; — than by abstinence from food to which there is a constitutional indifference, — than by a religious retirement altogether congenial to one's tastes. For it is in the thing which is unpleasant to ourselves in which self-denial consists, not the thing that may be unpleasant to other people.

And especially it should be our object that we deny ourselves in that which will be profitable to either soul or body, not in that which is mere vexing of the spirit without any ultimate good. It is said that the severity of the punishment in condemnation to the treadmill was doubled to the more serious offenders by their being compelled to work at an empty mill. Not such should be the Christian's Lenten offering of Self-Denial and fasting: none even of that which is his appointed work should be done for nought and in vain.



THIRD WEEK IN LENT.

THE EXERCISE OF SELF-DENIAL IN SYMPATHY.

“Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?”

“Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thine house? when thou seest the naked that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?” — *Isaiah*, lviii. 6, 7.

THAT Self-Denial is then most acceptable to God when it is not only employed in remedying our own nature's disease, but likewise in benefiting our “neighbour,” is the declaration of God himself. It is therefore most suitable to the season which is set apart for the especial exercise of Self-Denial to examine ourselves as to the manner in which we have hitherto per-

formed this most important part of the duty ; and the inquiry as to how we have hitherto performed it, to be effectually profitable, should be made with particular reference to the manner in which we are about to spend the coming week, on the supposition that it has been set apart for exclusive attention to this one species of Self-Denial. Both inquiries will indeed react on each other. Each difficulty that opposes any system of Self-Denial for our neighbour's good during this one week will serve painfully to remind us how few difficulties have been hitherto overcome, how few real attempts have been hitherto made on the same path ; while each inquiry as to what we have neglected during the time that is past will, if we are really in earnest, stimulate to persevering exertion in the future.

The simplest and easiest form in which Self-Denial can be exercised in sympathy, is that mentioned in the second verse of

those which precede this chapter. Almsgiving is a pleasant employment, even to the selfish, even to those hardened in self-indulgence. Our human nature, when not sunk to the lowest stage of depravity, shrinks from the sight of pain, and is ever willing to remove the suffering it cannot avoid witnessing, if this can be done without involving a disproportionate sacrifice—that is, if the pain witnessed can be removed by an act causing less personal unpleasantness than the sight of the pain. Hence the enormous profit of the street beggar. No one supposes that he is supported in his life of idleness and intemperance by the alms of the really generous and self-sacrificing. No, he lives on the alms of the self-indulgent and the luxurious, who shrink from the sight of well-simulated suffering, or cannot bear the harassing of importunity, or give a mite perhaps to their “neighbour” with vague sense of atonement for the thou-

sands lavished on self. Truly, this is *not* the dealing of "bread to the hungry" to which the word of God gives the name of "the fast which He has chosen," for that must ever involve Self-Denial and Self-Sacrifice.

Few earnest observers can fail to notice the almost universal impress of a law regulating the exercise of all human benevolence, which seems, as it were, a faint reflection from the great act by which our redemption was effected. Through a life of hardship and suffering, through a death of agony, were the blessings of the Gospel won for man; and it is only on the same path of suffering and Self-Denial, though with steps how far behind, that man can now win any benefits for his fellow man. The act of simply selfish good-nature leaves no trace for permanent good, on either the giver or receiver; while an apparently much more trifling act, resulting from Self-Denial,

will exercise permanently genial influences on both; and this frequently with such apparent want of connection between cause and effect, that it can only be accounted for by the existence of a mysterious law.

Much of the chafing of the spirit, the restlessness, the disappointment, so painfully witnessed in the beginners at benevolence, would be spared if they used their own experience and their observation to establish a belief in the certain fact, that without pain of some kind no real good can be effected for our fellow-men. The pain may be either in the preliminary Self-Denial, or it may be in the unexpected difficulties involved in a lightly undertaken enterprise of benevolence, or it may be in the unforeseen consequences which follow long after in the result, but that no undertaking productive of good to others has ever been carried through without some of these painful accompaniments or consequences,

all earnest observation of life will surely testify. And how different the effect on the spirit, whether these painful accompaniments or consequences be regarded with a vague sense of injustice, or received as a pledge that the act of benevolence is accepted by the Most High, — as a pledge that, however present appearances may be against us, “the bread we have cast,” as it were, “upon the waters, shall be found after many days.”*

A belief in this mysterious feature of God’s dispensations is a great help to the consideration of the present subject, — that of Self-Denial exercised in sympathy. To believe that the sympathy which is thus accompanied will not only strengthen and elevate our own moral nature, but will confer a proportionate benefit on those who are its objects, will make the path of Self-Denial easier and the cross of Self-Denial light. Also, let us consider the

* Ecclesiastes, xi. 1.

amazing honour that is put upon us weak sinful creatures by the opportunity of so far imitating — with all reverence it is spoken — the Saviour's work, that by the sufferings we ourselves experience we may win the bestowal of benefits on others.

There is something very attractive to a noble nature in this view of self-sacrifice; and it may frequently be less from the dangerous temptations of self-will than from a keen sense of the morally beautiful, that by asceticism the straightforward path of obedience to God is changed into tortuous windings. But the harder is ever the nobler duty, and to stop firmly in an exciting course of self-sacrifice when it involves more than belongs to ourselves, *is* hard — very hard. We are, however, not our own, we are bought with a price, — our body and our spirit are God's*, and we may not inflict injury on either, and unfit ourselves for future, perhaps more neces-

* 1 Cor. ix. 20.

sary, work in God's service, by yielding to a present excitement prompting to imprudent self-sacrifice. Health we have no right to risk, unless the path of duty is too plain to be possibly mistaken: happiness, either, it is not ours to sacrifice; if we give it up to another it may, to a differently constituted nature from our own, cease to be happiness, and, weakened by its loss, we may no longer have strength to do our appointed work. In truth, none of the great gifts of life may safely or conscientiously be sacrificed, if for only this reason, that they are all accompanied by responsibilities, of the fulfilment of which we shall have, each for himself, to render a strict account.

It is not in great sacrifices that either the opportunity or the duty of Self-Denial exercised in sympathy consists. In great sacrifices there must inevitably be (without very high attainments in the spiritual life) a glorification, and a consequent grati-

fication, of self. For as they are almost always self-chosen instead of appointed by God, they involve no sacrifice of our own will, without which sacrifice there is no real Self-Denial. With this sacrifice let us each see for ourselves how sympathy may be especially shown during this one week in Lent.

First, by what sacrifice of taste, of comfort, of amusement, by what diligent labour, or fatiguing exertion, or anxious thoughtfulness, can we show sympathy for the distresses of our poorer neighbours? If we have ever shown sympathy hitherto in Self-Denial, the duty will be easier, the way more plain. But if not, the difficulty will be great of even seeing what the duty is, and the manner in which it may be performed. To begin with the smallest things, with the most easily answered questions. Is there any object of taste, of personal gratification, which you might give up making your own, that the money thus

saved may relieve the wants of a poor neighbour? Is there no favourite pursuit that might be relinquished (wholly perhaps during this week of Self-Denial), and the time thus saved devoted to working for those who cannot work for themselves, or reading to those who cannot read to themselves, or in procuring, and, if you are so usefully skilled, preparing, food for the sick, remembering in the choice of each and all of these occupations that your sympathy for others is to be shown through something unpleasant to yourself.

Something unpleasant to yourself—yes, this test must guide in the choice of the self-denying action, but it is a test which vanishes in the execution. That which is safely tested in the beginning by being unpleasant may be tested with equal safety afterwards by being pleasant,—healthfully pleasant and permanently pleasant. For asceticism, the leading element in the

Self-Denial of the heathen, has no permitted place in that of the Christian. His Self-Denial is only one form of that wisdom whose "ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths peace."*

But sympathy towards our poorer neighbours, as it is the easiest, neither is it the most important way in which Self-Denial is to be exercised, nor the most profitable to one's own spirit: the equal, the superior, requires sympathy still more, and the self-sacrifice accompanying it is of a higher and more difficult kind. What patience is required, what love, what vigilance, what stern suppression of personal feelings and impulses, what tender forbearance for the feelings and impulses of others! When, towards whom, and in what degree, have we exercised the self-denial of such sympathy as this? Try to remember even one instance in which you have listened with patient sympathy (for patience alone


* Proverbs, iii. 17.

is not enough) to the recital of hopes and fears that seem to your more enlightened judgment equally ridiculous, — to the minute details of unimportant circumstances repulsive to your tastes or to your feelings, or both, — to useless lamentations over unchangeable circumstances — to uninteresting schemes in the past and uninteresting projects for the future? I do not say that in some cases it would not be a positive duty to refuse such listening and to rebuke the speaker, but this duty can only be safely ascertained by submitting it to the test of Self-Denial. If it be really a greater effort to listen with patient sympathy than to rebuke openly or to administer the secondary form of rebuke in uncourteous inattention, you may safely conclude that the decision to listen is best for yourself.


You may, however, be called on for sympathy in much more difficult forms than this. While your own heart is wrung

by fears and anxiety, you may be required to listen patiently to the lengthened detail, to the laboured corroboration, of every painful apprehension which you have been trying to subdue. The thoughts you most anxiously try to banish, the remembrance which to you is agony to dwell on, may by coarser natures be dragged forward into light, and discussed in every painful variety of aspect, thus to alleviate their own suffering; for to them, to the hard and cold, in whose being there is no *depth*, it really is an alleviation. And where is your Christian sympathy then? Can you, do you, exercise Self-Denial that they, through your sufferings, may obtain relief for their own?

The duty of the kind of sympathy here spoken of is seldom considered, and indifferently practised; perhaps there is no species of Self-Denial in which those who are at all spiritually minded have so little experience. There is generally a vague




idea that sympathy cannot exist where there is the strong dissimilarity of taste and feeling which has been above described. It is, however, only in cases such as these that there is really any Self-Denial in sympathy. The sympathy of a look, of one brief word, of a passing tone of voice, is as easy to the giver as it is precious to the receiver, but there must be community of spirit before such sympathy can be either given or appreciated, and this indeed would sadly limit the sphere of sympathy. Most dangerously too for our spiritual life, which grows by the constant exercise of that especially Christ-like feature of benevolence. If the sympathy of the Saviour were not to be granted to natures immeasurably inferior to His own, where would be our hope of receiving any of that great and soothing help on the rugged heavenward path? This consideration should have a powerful influence upon the manner in which we estimate the claims



of others upon our sympathy. The fears that are confided to us may be exaggerated or groundless, the hopes may be childish or visionary, the sorrows and joys alike such as no lofty mind could dwell upon. But let us remember, when tempted to impatience or sarcasm, or even to the defective sympathy of inattentive listening, that the disproportion which exists between the cares and joys of the lowest created nature and those of the highest, must be even as nought when compared to the disproportion between the Creator and the created. And as, if we use prayer aright, all things that interest or concern our earthly being are made known unto God, how can we claim for them the Saviour's sympathy if our poor weak nature will not stoop to bestow sympathy on other creatures who are, in some immeasurable degree, more weak and more sinful than ourselves?

The difficulty of exercising sympathy



towards inferior or even dissimilar natures is, however, too great to be overcome without steady purposes of Self-Denial. Wherever they exist, the means to overcome this difficulty will assuredly be found within reach. First and most powerful of these means is the strong principle of Christian love, founded on Christian union. Those who claim our sympathy are one with us in Christ, members of the same mystical body, saved by the same Redemption, sanctified by the same Spirit, and becoming meet here for the same glorious eternity. The more deeply each member of Christ's body, the Church, feels the extent and value of his own high privileges of position, the more powerfully will his sympathies be drawn out towards those who are sharers in these privileges. Nor can mere differences or inferiority in intellect or taste, or matters of feeling, exclude from earthly sympathy those with whom we look forward to an eternity of union. The

exercise of Christian love in universal sympathy begins that eternity of union even here below, even now.

Subordinate means are also most useful in overcoming the minor difficulties of sympathy, which do not cease to exist because the determination to fulfil the duty is fully formed. The great gifts of imagination, of quick perception, of refined feeling, may here find their safest and best exercise. Refined feeling will teach that true and tender sympathy which often consists in the careful withholding of any of its external manifestations; quick perception will teach the times and the seasons when sympathy is welcome, and is efficient, and the manner of expression most suited to each individual case; whilst, above all things, imagination is needed to enable the giver of sympathy to place himself in the very same position as those who require it, not only as to external circumstances, but as regards

mental constitution and habits of thought and life. Without this exercise of imagination entirely genuine sympathy is impossible; nor is the natural gift of imagination sufficient without its habitual and self-denying exercise in this particular direction.

Let not the reader try to escape from this subject without ascertaining to the satisfaction of conscience whether his or her imagination has ever been thus exercised. We are all ready enough to attribute to ourselves the gifts of imagination, of quick perception, of refined feeling, and often make dangerous use of them to discover or to exaggerate our own personal trials and the wrongs inflicted by others upon us; but let us try to name the single case in which these same gifts have been exercised with a view to increasing the efficiency of our powers of sympathy. If inquiry on this point is made in sincerity and earnestness, although the answer (as

too frequently happens) be in the negative, the inquiry will not end here. Awakened conscience will suggest that what has not been done before may be done now. Awakened conscience will point out what particular cases within your more immediate sphere have hitherto in vain craved or required your sympathy. But, alas! awakened conscience will sleep again if its suggestion be not instantly acted upon; and each succeeding slumber is heavier and more difficult to arouse from than the last.

This subject cannot be closed without some notice of one important point, where, of all others, the duty of exercising Self-Denial in sympathy is least considered — certainly least practised. The case I refer to is that of domestic servants. Complaints are heard without end of their ingratitude and misconduct; but “the lion does paint the picture,” or there would be a far different estimate of the kindnesses for which

gratitude is expected, of the requirements which, unfulfilled, are imagined to constitute misconduct. How seldom do the former include even common justice! How frequently do the latter extend beyond any expectations that could be reasonably formed of the conduct of the best educated among the most independent classes! Domestic servants are in very truth what their masters and mistresses make them: it is because the latter are selfish and tyrannical, and blind to the responsibilities of their position, that the former have all the faults induced by an almost utterly dependent position. How few and how rare are the cases in which Self-Denial is shown in sympathy for the feelings, the interests, the hardships, or the infirmities of domestic servants! Let each reader make the appeal directly to him or herself. When and in what case has pain and inconvenience been voluntarily submitted to, that the labours of a

servant might not be increased to hardship? When have hasty, disrespectful words been patiently borne through sympathy for temporary weakness or strong provocation? When have annoying omissions of duty been candidly excused upon fair excuses given, which only through sympathy could be fairly judged? When has Self-Denial been exercised in sacrificing personal advantage and convenience to the permanent improvement of a servant's position in life? And is it not exactly those who show the least kindness, the least forbearance, the least sympathy, who most characterise as ingratitude any effort made by domestic servants "to," in their own phraseology, "better themselves"? The complaints of ingratitude would be much fewer if the efforts (when there are *any*) to deserve gratitude were guided by sympathy. Without that the domestic servant will not be shown even strict justice, on which alone a permanent superstruc-

ture of gratitude can be laid. "There is no tyranny," writes D'Alembert, "so great as that of a benefactor." There is, however, a greater still, when the same spirit of tyranny is exercised, while the position of benefactor is only imaginary.

FOURTH WEEK IN LENT.


THE EXERCISE OF SELF-DENIAL IN SOCIETY.

It has been often said, that "if retirement shows us what we ought to be, society only can show us what we are." Both these lessons are not only of equal importance but inseparably connected: they react upon each other. We shall always deceive ourselves respecting what we ought to be, unless we are enabled to see clearly what we are; nor can we attain to any vivid and practical consciousness of present deficiencies, without a distinct perception of the mark towards which we are to press.* It is only another signification, then, of the above common saying, that while in retirement it is our appointed


* Philippians, iii. 14.

work to acquire an accurate knowledge of the true standard of excellence, our appointed work in society is to put that knowledge to the test of practice. Either is unsafe while separated from the other; and not profitless only.

By some perversion of language or of ideas, society and amusement have come to be considered almost synonymous terms. But "society, to an observing mind, is study;" society, to an earnest mind, is discipline; society, to a conscientious mind, is a sphere of duty. It is only by effort and habit that it can become, to any of the higher classes of mind, even a relaxation, far less a mere amusement. Not that amusement is not itself a duty, and an important duty, in its right time and place; but it would no longer be amusement if it shared in all the extensive and complicated responsibilities of society, using that term in its widest sense. In this widest sense it is, and very partially in



the sense of mere amusement, that the exercise of Self-Denial in society will now be considered. Few words need be said on the subject of exercising Self-Denial by the withdrawal from society, as that does not really concern the present subject; and these few words are an earnest recommendation to a very strict search into the motives of such withdrawal. These motives are most unsafe guides of action, unless they can bear the strict test of Self-Denial. It is only by the earnest, conscientious employment of this test, that advantageous use can be made of subordinate tests, such as personal experience, observation of the comparative loss and gain to others from like practices, and the probable consequences inferred from a knowledge of human nature. And now, to return from this digression, which it really is,—the present subject only having reference to those persons for whom social intercourse is plainly one of the duties



belonging to that "state of life to which it has pleased God to call them."*

That it may be ascertained how Self-Denial may best be exercised in the fulfilment of the duties of social intercourse, there must be, first, a distinct recognition of these duties. And in society, as in all other circumstances, it cannot be doubted that our first duty is to ourselves. It is only when self-love is surreptitiously indulged, on the guidance of instinct or impulse, instead of being firmly adopted as a principle, that selfishness is indulged, or selfishness cherished. An enlightened conscientious self-love is opposed to and can never lead to selfishness; and as selfishness rejects and shuns every occasion of Self-Denial, so does an enlightened and conscientious self-love incessantly require its exercise. Whatever, therefore, may be the promptings of good-nature or of vanity, whatever the fear of giving pain or the fear of singu-

* The Catechism.

larity, the first duty is to ourselves, to maintain personal dignity, and a distinctly manifest simplicity and consistency of character. The duty to our "neighbour" is more complicated ; not always quite so plain as that "he who runs may read." Therefore, experience is required as a guide, no less than habitual Self-Denial as a test.

One of the plainest and least varying duties of society is universal courtesy ; courtesy, not only towards those who are courteous in return, not only towards those whose approbation is desired or whose good-will is already possessed, — but towards every individual whom the chances or, to speak more correctly, the duties, of society bring within reach. To commonplace people of the world, whose aim and object in society is a commonplace popularity, this universal courtesy is an easy task ; but to the fastidious and the sensitive, the high-spirited and indepen-

dent, or the shy and reserved nature, the duty of universal courtesy must involve a constant exercise of the duty of Self-Denial. What more difficult self-control than to maintain an unvarying outward consistency of manner, while the feelings of the proud, or timid, or sensitive spirit vary with every passing breath of circumstance, like the flutterings of an aspen leaf. A well-known satirist asserted of a French Abbé, that he had never known "a man with so much kindness of manner or so little kindness of heart." An easily solved paradox: for the cold imperturbability of spirit which is grounded on want of feeling and its inseparable accompaniment, dulness of perception, removes all self-denying difficulty from the practice of universal courtesy.

But Self-Denial does not escape from difficulties; it overcomes them. Keen perception, quick sensitiveness, firm independence of spirit, are to be controlled, not

subdued. It is only through these means that effectual discipline can be exercised over the nobler natures to which they belong ; and to the end they must remain as inseparable accompaniments,—serving, according as principle or instinct reigns, either as avenues to temptation or as bulwarks to resist it. And when the duty of Self-Denial is steadily recognised, most of the painfulness of overcoming a difficulty will be removed. It will no longer be looked upon as an unpleasantness, to be endured because it cannot be helped, but as a desired opportunity for acquiring proficiency in an all-important lesson. Very little experience, if even that is required, will prove that this view of the difficulties in the way of exercising universal courtesy may change the pain which formerly accompanied them into a lively interest. The cold look, the careless word, the abrupt manner, the neglect of indifference or even of intention, will lose their

power to wound the most sensitive, when they are viewed in the light of opportunities to test and to forward one's progress towards the attainment of a much desired end. And the secondary good, which must ever follow on the first, is by no means unimportant. It is this: that an over-sensitiveness, or any sensitiveness at all, to imaginary slights and imaginary coldness, will vanish in the bracing atmosphere of habitual Self-Denial, and the effort to guard one's own looks, and words, and tones from reflecting even a shade of any variation from Christian courtesy in the manners of those around, will be too engrossing and too interesting to leave room for any fancied variation in the looks, tones, or words of others.

And let it not be objected that this constant effort must deprive manner of its greatest charm, the charm of unconsciousness. Where there is disease, the disease of sin, there must indeed always exist a

certain degree of self-consciousness. Only, "if Adam had remained in Paradise, we should have needed neither anatomy nor metaphysics." But self-consciousness to the symptoms will be less in proportion as the attention is concentrated on the means of cure,—in proportion as the faith is strong in the means of cure. Those who are firm in the purpose of exercising Self-Denial, and firm in the belief that through its means only can the Christian grace of universal benevolence be attained, cannot possibly receive from these purposes any of the damaging self-consciousness which other motives induce. And, however unacknowledged or unconscious, motives there will almost always be,—always, until we have ascended, after long discipline, into that higher moral atmosphere where motives cease to operate, because their need no longer exists.

Nor let it be supposed that the habitual effort to fulfil the duty of universal

courtesy need in any way damage the delicious *abandon* that accompanies the sense of full confidence, of full sympathy.

—— “The mutual look,
When hearts are of each other sure,”

will not be dimmed or clouded by even that small degree of self-consciousness which must always, in ordinary society, accompany strict vigilance against temptation to the non-fulfilment of duty. And that these sensations of happy confidence in the presence of friendship and affection are most vividly experienced by those who are most strict in the exercise of the Self-Denial required in ordinary society, is the reward which every moral habit necessarily involves in itself.

The duty of universal courtesy includes under one general head almost all the duties of society, and their subdivisions are so various and extensive that even the naming of them cannot be attempted here. There are, however, two other subjects of

considerable importance, which must be noticed before coming to a close. The first, one does sometimes hear spoken of as a duty, however imperfect its fulfilment in practice. The duty is this, the exercise of Self-Denial in contributing one's share of trouble to the more uninteresting portions of social intercourse. Dull people are very tiresome to talk to; the gifted and the brilliant naturally feel their high qualifications wasted in the fatiguing occupation; but their impartial judgment must surely be, that when the chances of society throw the dull in one's way, it is a duty to avert from them the painful consciousness of their own deficiencies,—the painful sense of being a dead weight on social intercourse. And it is a mistake to suppose that such exercise of Self-Denial involves even the temporary waste of brilliant conversational powers and high intellectual gifts. Their full appreciation cannot, indeed, be expected from the dull; but a

useful and admirable exercise of them may be found in varied and ingenious efforts to find suitable entertainment for the dull. The intellectual profit may be as great, while the moral profit is far greater, of successfully interesting a heavy and uninteresting companion, than in the most satisfying intercourse of congenial minds. There is, however, a more severe trial of patience, a stronger exercise of Self-Denial in society, than simply entertaining the dull,—it is that of making the dull entertain you! This is at once much more satisfactory to themselves and more advantageous to you. For in the laborious “drawing out” of any ideas, capabilities, and feelings possessed by the dull, many high qualities are developed,—qualities which lie dormant during the enjoyment of entirely congenial society.

One more of the duties of society must be briefly noticed. It is quaintly spoken of by George Herbert:—

"The civil guest
Will no more talk all, than eat all, the feast."

The exercise of Self-Denial on this point is probably extremely difficult, being seldom witnessed: its importance to the enjoyment of society is, however, great. Even the most silent are frequently sensible to the provocation of being allowed no degree of share in conversation, and the consequently implied insignificance of whatever they themselves might say, if allowed to speak. But, if even the most silent are occasionally irritated by the incessant talker, those who love talking themselves are of course continually exposed to this temptation: and not only those who like talking, but those who like conversation, — which is a hopeless mode of intercourse in the presence of the incessant talker. His is so engrossing an occupation, that the perceptions, even when naturally keen, are always obtuse while it is being carried on; thus it is

difficult for the incessant talker to form any idea of even the manner, far less of the degree, in which the practice interferes with the enjoyment of others in society. It is unobserved how often the unwilling listener is not only uninterested in the present subject, but deeply interested in that discussed in another part of the room. It is unobserved how weariness or impatience speak in the features and the tone of voice, if courtesy excludes it from the words. The incessant talker, in fact, thinks of personal enjoyment alone; there is no exercise of Self-Denial in his intercourse with society; and therefore it is that the injury inflicted on himself is still greater than the annoyance he inflicts upon others. As he is in no degree influenced by the consideration whether the listener likes to listen or not, there is naturally no effort made to make what is spoken worth listening to. Intellectual gifts are thus entirely wasted, so far as


talking is concerned; for the utterance of words, the exercise of mere animal energy, is the unconscious object of the speaker—by no means the expression of ideas.

But the moral injury is still greater than the intellectual loss. Whenever it happens that the incessant talker has uninterrupted opportunities for the favourite employment, a gradual deterioration of character insensibly takes place. Serious reflection there is no room for, still less inclination; and thoughtful consideration for the comfort, feelings, and tastes of others is as much out of the question as any thoughtful or practical consideration for one's own moral or intellectual welfare. These extreme cases are only so seldom witnessed because either in the family circle or in general society the self-indulgence of the incessant talker is constantly and severely checked. But the only permanently beneficial silence is that which, by the exercise of Self-Denial, he im-

poses on himself. The simplest and the easiest mode of Self-Denial should be tried first, until some facility is gained in the practice. Thus, self-imposed silence during those intervals of the day when there is least opportunity for its interruption, or for a certain number of minutes at varying intervals, has been successfully recommended to beginners — the silence not to be infringed under any degree of temptation.

And the time thus set apart will gradually exercise great and beneficial influences on the formation of the character and intellect. For mere desultory occupation offers too strong a temptation to the infringement of silence to be safely ventured on during its imposition: there must be either solitary thought or solitary study, and the thought which occupies the hours set apart for the exercise of Self-Denial is not likely to partake of the nature of useless or hurtful reverie.

And even when the appointed hours of silence are over, the same recklessness of talk cannot be indulged in as before. A sobering influence will be experienced from the Self-Denial that is past, through which its exercise will, in a degree, be carried on into the present. Nor is it only the flow of words that will be checked by the sobering influences of self-imposed silence; the same influence will gradually regulate the thoughts: these, and the words in which they are expressed, perpetually react upon each other. Thoughts too deep for words, and thoughts too serious to find fluent expression in words, may at length, by the exercise of Self-Denial in silence, become possible to those who were once incessant talkers; for the whole character must gradually improve in depth and earnestness. It is certain that strength and energy of some kind or other almost always characterise the persons here spoken of, and they need only the discipline of Self-



Denial to direct that strength, and employ those energies aright. I cannot leave this subject without quoting in conclusion the well-known lines from the *Lyra Apostolica*: —

“Prune thou thy words, the thoughts control
That o'er thee swell and throng;
They will condense within thy soul,
And turn to purpose strong.”

FIFTH WEEK IN LENT.

THE EXERCISE OF SELF-DENIAL IN INTELLECTUAL PURSUITS.

IT is not in resisting temptations to sin that the exercise of Self-Denial is, usually understood to consist. It is true we must deny our corrupt nature when we resist temptations to sin; this is in a certain sense, therefore, Self-Denial, and doubtless the most difficult Self-Denial of all. But the Bible teaches, the Saviour commands, an additional Self-Denial to this,—a Self-Denial in lawful, in innocent things; it is this Self-Denial we are called on especially to practise during the seasons of fasting appointed by the Church. To deny ourselves by resisting temptations is a duty belonging to all times, to all places; never varying in its

requirements, never allowing in its fulfilment one shade of relaxation. But Self-Denial in the use of things lawful, though to a certain degree the necessary daily discipline of the life, ought to vary in conformity to the teaching of the Church, and the consciousness of our own spiritual and moral necessities. The exercise of Self-Denial in intellectual pursuits will naturally be most regulated by the latter class of motives; though when such pursuits are, as in some few cases, the principal pleasure of the life, they should clearly, to a certain degree, be subject to the season of Self-Denial appointed by the Church. Of course it is with especial reference to the season of Lent that they are here treated of.

According to the system previously recommended, it is supposed that this one week is set apart for the especial exercise of Self-Denial in this particular feature of the enjoyments of life; and, in accordance

with the plan suggested throughout, the Self-Denial is to have a double aim and end. Its object is not only to be that of disciplining and subduing the will, but of bestowing benefits on others, or making some beneficial acquisition for oneself.

The number of readers who can at all understand how Self-Denial can be exercised in intellectual pursuits, or how it can be a duty so to exercise it, will, of course, be extremely small. Few, unfortunately, are those who, by experience, know that there are exquisite pleasures in the cultivation of the intellect,—pleasures so seductive as to call imperatively on the strictly conscientious to exercise Self-Denial in their enjoyment. It is, however, necessarily, only those few who are here addressed.

It is not only the pleasure attending intellectual pursuits, which constitutes their danger and points out the expediency of the exercise of Self-Denial in

that particular direction. They are also dangerous from their engrossing nature. If indulged in as the chief pursuit of life, they swallow up its other important interests; they deaden the ear to the call of duty; they cherish indolence; still more fatally, they cherish selfishness. They also cause isolation, for they must most frequently be enjoyed alone. One is more easily satisfied with the quality of sympathy on any other subject than on that of intellectual pleasures. To listen to silly criticism, or, still worse, unappreciative praise, jars harshly upon a finer sense. It is more easy to bear with opinions, or practice, or anything else differing from one's own, than with different tastes. And the finer the intellectual sense becomes, the wider of course will be the distance between that and an uneducated or naturally obtuse perception. Narrower and narrower still grows

the inclusive circle, stricter and stricter still the sometimes unconscious exclusion.

Isolation is a great danger, especially isolation on an elevated position. It is almost impossible not to look down upon those who hold a lower place. And the elevated position gives "a bird's eye" view of people and things, instead of the more natural perspective. Those who do not see as others see, cannot give or receive a good and wholesome sympathy. But those who are on the height must stay there; no escape now from the dangers and responsibilities of position. These must be met as best they may, and most effectually, it is certain, by the exercise of Self-Denial.

The dangers of isolation may be in a degree obviated by increasing, as much as possible, the opportunities of sympathy on ordinary subjects. Do not talk to people about what you think they cannot understand, if you find their want of appreciation damages and chills your kindly feel-

ings towards them ; but seek diligently for some subject on which they really can sympathise with you. You may not care for such partial sympathy, and then the opportunity for Self-Denial offers itself. Try to care for it. It will be an acceptable Lenten offering, if you can train yourself to exchange sympathy with any one individual whom you have hitherto considered unequal to you in all things, because intellectually unequal.

But isolation is only one of the dangers of intellectual pursuits. As has been said before, they are likely to lead to the exclusion of all other interests, to deaden the ear to the call of duty, to cherish selfishness and indolence. It is with reference to each and all of these dangers that the really intellectual student is earnestly recommended to exercise Self-Denial during the present period. In what way during this week can the temptation to indolence be denied ? What sort of help can be of-

ferred to a "neighbour," which will not only involve the temporary abandonment of one's cherished pursuits, but also be really difficult and troublesome? Has indolence been ever thus denied? *will* it be during the ensuing week thus denied?

Then there are the temptations to selfishness. Some one is waiting for the book you are reading, and you will not resign it; or some business is wished to be carried on in the room with your engrossing studies, and you cannot relinquish them; or an absent friend is left without a long-expected letter; a visit of kindness or of courtesy is left unpaid. There are many occasions that justify the resistance or the heedlessness of such claims as these, but they all offer opportunities of subduing the power of selfishness; therefore when it can be safely done, without affording dangerous precedents, seasons set apart for Self-Denial should be marked by such exercises of it as are afforded by the tri-

fling, but constantly recurring, circumstances named above.

Next to be considered, is the insensibility to the call of duty often induced by engrossing intellectual pursuits. The danger is not so much that the call may be unheeded, — for then there may be at least a consciousness of error, — but that it may be altogether unheard. A strict self-examination on this point is earnestly recommended during this season of Lent; and a strong accompanying effort to hear what the calls of duty really are. It would be truly an acceptable Lenten offering, to begin even now the permanent sacrifice, to some distinct and decided purpose, of a part of the time and energies hitherto engrossed by one favourite and too selfish pursuit.

LAST WEEK IN LENT.

THE EXERCISE OF SELF-DENIAL IN WORK.

“ IN the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, until thou return unto the ground,” was the prophecy of a punishment which has been fully carried out by the constitution of the world and by the moral government of God. But “labour was the charter by which we hold existence” only since the moment that Adam fell; as a remedy only was it needed; the “upright” nature that God created required no such regimen as that which is now inseparable from the cure of disease. Let us, then, humbly receive our own allotted task of work, not only with patience as the deserved punishment of sin, but with gratitude, because the great mercy of God has so altered the nature of the punishment as

to turn it, by its healing influences, into a blessing. For even as the fall of Adam, by the infinite loving-kindnesses of God, was so overruled for good that fallen man was given a capability of more exalted happiness and closer communion with God than seems to have been within the reach of unfallen man, so is each punishment inflicted on the consequences of that fall made the means of higher degrees of happiness, because of higher qualifications for happiness than could have existed without the infliction of punishment. "God doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men."* Every chastisement, even when sent, as it must be, in wrath against sin, has an appointed end of mercy. Punishment, destitute of all efficacy to produce repentance and reformation, belongs not to the period of our earthly probation. Its awful time will come.

* Lamentations, iii. 33.

Of punishments there are two sorts — first, those which come more directly from the hand of God, and which must be endured, whether our will consents or not. Such is death, such is sickness, such are the inevitable disappointments of earthly hope. These are punishments which are appointed unto all, which the most self-indulgent cannot escape. So far, therefore, opportunities are offered to all of a regimen, which may be effectual through the all-sufficiency of the Saviour's blood, to the healing of the disease of sin. None of those who are still chastised by affliction, have yet been utterly forsaken of God. Of them the awful words have not yet been spoken, "Ephraim is joined unto idols; let him alone."* Secondly, there are the remedial punishments of a strict self-imposed regimen and severe discipline, which, though voluntary, are marked out as being the punishment of God for sin, because

* Hosea, iv. 17.

of the necessity of their employment, because only through them can our own subordinate part in obtaining freedom from the power and the taint of sin be effected.

On such a subject it is difficult to guard one's language carefully enough; and to insist strenuously on the absolute necessity of "working out our own salvation,"* without sometimes *seeming* to impugn the great truths that "it is God which worketh in us both to will and to do,"† and that Jesus Christ hath "obtained eternal redemption for us."‡ For it cannot be expected that the ordinary reader should be capable of taking such comprehensive views of the gospel and of man's nature, as to judge that the all-sufficiency of the Saviour's merits and the completeness of His work are necessarily implied whenever there is any expression of hope that our own work may be accepted, and

* Philippians, ii. 12.

† Ib. ii. 13.

‡ Hebrews, ix. 12.

that energetic personal exertion can never be confidently urged on a weak and helpless nature, without an implied recognition that "God works in us and by us." The giving offence to those who entirely negative the duty or the efficiency of human effort, is of course inevitable in a work professedly devoted to the subject of voluntary human effort ; but the giving offence to those who only fear the undue exaltation of human effort, and a consequent depreciation of the all-sufficiency of the Saviour's work and merits, is here and always earnestly deprecated. If such offence be given, the error is in word only, not in thought ; and it is anxiously hoped that a candid view of the whole may remove any false impression received from a part.

To return now to the subject which led to this digression, the assertion must again be ventured on, that it is through severe discipline alone that freedom from the

power and the taint of sin can be gradually acquired. Such are the appointed means by which God works. Through a miracle He may dispense with them ; but as this would be an infringement of His ordinary laws of moral government, it would be a literal miracle. That no part of the strict regimen and severe discipline spoken of is more important than work, may be inferred from the prominent place given to it amongst the remedial punishments inflicted by God at the period of the Fall. Here it is classed with sorrow and with death.* There is, however, one great difference, which has been already spoken of, between these two classes of remedial punishments. Sorrow comes to all, and death comes to all ; there is no escape from these consequences of sin ; but a considerable number of human beings may, unfortunately for them, altogether escape from the re-

* Genesis, iii. 17, 18, 19.

medial punishment of work. Many a respectable character, very respectable in his or her own eyes, goes down to the grave without having even known what work is. Alas ! by their escape from this punishment of sin, they have also escaped from the remedy involved in it. How efficient this remedy is, may be gathered from general views of life alone, without close personal observation or experience ; for a very large class of persons, heathen in the midst of Christian privileges, are kept within the bounds of moral restraint solely by the discipline of hard work and its attendant privations. It is not religious principle that keeps the great mass of the working population patient, enduring, honest, and kindly hearted. Few amongst them have even religious knowledge ; and yet it is a well-known fact, that, in the practice of some of the noblest moral virtues, their well-taught, rich, and consequently too often self-indulgent supe-

riors cannot, on an average, bear any comparison with them. How readily is the scanty meal of the poor shared with the still poorer neighbour! How cheerfully is the nightly watch by the sick-bed undertaken after days of unceasing toil! With what patient courage are the sufferings of pain and sickness borne, unmitigated, in their case, by the alleviations which wealth can lavishly supply! With what genuine hospitality is the humble home shared with those who are left homeless! Self-Denial in sympathy is constantly exhibited amongst the poor to a degree scarcely, if ever, witnessed in the conduct of even the most benevolent amongst the rich; and this is, doubtless, the result of the severe discipline undergone through the perpetual necessity of hard work.


It is true that the same severity of discipline is not needed to keep the well-educated and the intellectual under moral restraint, which is required by those whose

mixed nature is lower on the scale of intelligent being; therefore it naturally follows that wherever, in their case, higher degrees of moral excellence are aimed at, the discipline is most frequently voluntarily undertaken, and not imposed by circumstance. Amongst "the poor rich," indeed, the discipline of hard work is frequently as inevitable, as independent of choice, as it is amongst the very lowest of poor; with only this difference,—that in proportion as the characters to be disciplined rise on the scale of intelligent being, so does the nature of the hard work to which they are called ascend from mere manual labour to the labour of the mind. And even when inevitable, and in no degree self-imposed, it is always observable that hard work amongst the upper classes, as well as amongst the lower, has a bracing and purifying influence. Scarcely ever is great moral degradation witnessed, or the meaner forms of worldliness, or intense

and thorough selfishness, or utter want of earnestness in those who have been always, or for any length of time, subjected to the discipline of hard work.

No life of mere luxurious occupation, however useful or however constant the occupation may be, will *satisfy* the human mind. Physiologists assert that even the bodily health suffers from neglect in the habitual exercise of any possessed mental faculty; and that diseases, not merely nervous, are caused or removed by the disregard or the fulfilment of intellectual responsibilities.

The effect on the moral nature is still more easily traceable; still more uniform. Weariness of life, discontent at the circumstances of life, irritability of temper, the exactions of selfishness, have no more effectual cure than the discipline of hard work. By it the mind is raised into a clearer and more bracing atmosphere, where the same things cease to wound, or



the spirit rises buoyant from beneath the momentary pressure. Hard work leaves no time, hard work leaves no room, for thinking about one's meaner self, for the indulgence of selfishness. Self-love alone will remain, each day more enlightened, more firmly based on principle. The reader who is weary of life,—the reader who is discontented at the circumstances of life,—the reader who must mournfully confess to irritability of temper, and to frequent thoughts and strong considerations respecting personal interests and comforts,—may never before have received the suggestion, that a certain cure can be found for his diseased moral condition in the exercise of Self-Denial, by the execution of hard work. The reception of this suggestion will probably depend on the extent to which observation and inquiry, and former endeavours after improvement in other directions, have prepared the mind to believe it or to profit by it. Certain it is,


that without a considerable degree of faith in its efficacy the experiment of hard work will not be fairly tried. To break through habits of idleness and indolence requires a strength and energy of character almost, alas! not wholly, inconsistent with their adoption: strong will and strong belief are both wanted here.

Then there is the great difficulty of finding out what hard work really is, and also what kind of hard work the low state of a beginner's qualifications will enable him to execute. A wise, determined, and experienced friend, is here an invaluable, almost a necessary help. In the absence of such a help there is, however, one great consolation, — that if the effort can be made alone, if the struggle against indolence and inexperience can be successfully carried through alone, the success is far more complete, the beneficial results far more likely to be permanent and increasing. It is, of course, very important

in such a case to have the attention and all the practical energies entirely concentrated on so difficult a subject for a given time. Let it be supposed, then, that the plan recommended here is adopted, and the purpose of the present week determined to be the exercise of Self-Denial in work — hard work, therefore, for there is no Self-Denial in ordinary work. The idlest people find a difficulty in getting through the day without that.

All must find out for themselves what hard work is. There is great danger of discouragement in attempting very hard work at first, while there is, from want of habit, a real incapacity for its execution; there is great danger of mistake also; the inexperienced not being qualified to judge whether the work be really hard or not; and if not, neither is the intended discipline carried out, nor any progress made.

It might probably be safest to begin with the work which is only “hard,” by



the exercise it involves of patience. Hearing a child a spelling lesson, cutting out a child's pinafore, might be hard work enough for a beginner, because, with inexperience, considerable exercise of patience is required even in such things as these. But labour must be intellectual, to afford opportunity for any great exercise of Self-Denial in work. Intellectual effort, to those unaccustomed to it, is greater and more painful than any other; while, to the most experienced, fresh fields of hard labour may always be found here. Those who have once found out what intellectual hard work really is, will have no after difficulty in providing themselves with employment suited to their expanding capabilities, and suited to the still-continued exercise of Self-Denial. This, as the powers of the mind gradually strengthen, and that which was formerly distasteful labour becomes now a daily increasing delight, is not simply the only

safe test of hard work still continuing a moral discipline, but also the only safe test of the real hardness of the work. For by the magical influence of habit and of practice, that which a year ago was a most painful effort, stretching the mental faculties to the utmost, may to-day be a delightful exercise of permanently acquired power.


To the character of women the exercise of Self-Denial in work is almost more important than any other discipline. Their peculiar faults principally result from their ignorance, or at least their almost total neglect, on this point. Few men of the middle or upper classes can well pass through life without at least knowing what hard work is, even though they be able to escape from its necessity, or may never voluntarily practise it. But a woman can get through the ordinary routine of feminine education very satisfactorily to herself and her friends, without

ever obtaining an insight into the real nature of work. It is even through the very process of so-called education that she acquires habits of trifling and habits of idleness, and becomes almost incapable of acquiring, in after life, habits of thought, of patience, of seriousness. The intellectual deficiencies of ordinary female education might be easily pardoned if they did not involve moral inferiority; but this they do involve. That women are unjust, that women are capricious, that women are tyrannical, the experience of life too sadly proves. But this is not alone because they are weaker than men, but because their education does not involve that discipline of hard work which the weak require even more than the strong.

It is not, however, the highly-educated woman only who may acquire a sense of justice, who may acquire the power of keeping to the same purpose, who may rule with gentleness, and obey when it is

her duty. There are other disciplines besides that of hard work, and by them the ordinary faults of a woman's character are sometimes, in a great degree, subdued. The discipline of severely exercised authority, the discipline of heavy affliction, the discipline of continual privations, are often effectual to convert vanity, frivolity, caprice, and tyranny, into earnestness, consistency, and self-sacrifice. But the necessity of an extreme severity of discipline would be greatly obviated by the habitual exercise of Self-Denial in work, and the same improvement or alteration of character might be thus earlier attained by milder means.

There may be various opinions as to the advantages of a woman's proficiency in Greek or in Latin, in mathematics or metaphysics. Much is to be said on both sides of the question ; but as regards the importance of the process of acquisition, the experienced and the observing can



feel no manner of doubt. There is, indeed, one way in which even the thing acquired may have an important bearing on the moral condition, by filling the mind with subjects for thought and conversation, and thus averting the deterioration inseparable from the ordinary gossip or solitary reveries of the undisciplined and uneducated woman. But the great benefit to be derived from a solid and laborious education is the discipline by which knowledge is acquired, not the knowledge itself. For the effects of this discipline shall remain throughout eternity, while the hour is fast approaching when the "knowledge shall vanish away."*

* 1 Cor. xiii. 8.

THE END.



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